This is material on the Italian community at Rosati (formerly Knobview) in Phelps County, Missouri. The collection includes the business notebook of Antonio M. Piazza, 1918-1931; a tape-recorded interview with Jodie Donati, 1982; and a research paper by Francesco Brogi, 1983.

Rosati, on the eastern edge of Phelps County, was known as Knobview until 1931. It was founded by immigrants from northern Italy, who came to Missouri via Sunnyside, Arkansas. They had been encouraged to emigrate by the Corbin Plantation Company at Sunnyside, which hoped to find a solution to its problems in securing a satisfactory labor force for the production of cotton. One hundred twenty-five families made the journey from Genoa to Sunnyside in 1895, moving into houses built for them by the company.

Sickness and an inability to adapt to cotton farming left many of the immigrants dissatisfied, and a committee of three was chosen to select a new location for settlement. One of the members recommended land at Tontitown in northwestern Arkansas, while the other two favored land owned by the St. Louis & San Francisco (“Frisco”) Railroad Company near the flag stop of Knobview in Phelps County, Missouri.

The first small group arrived at Knobview in 1898 and began to build houses for those on their way. By March, thirty families had arrived. As it would require years of labor to make the Ozark soil sufficiently productive to support all of the families, most of the men took seasonal jobs in railroad construction and in the coal mines of southern Illinois. Tomato production provided some farm income through sales to a local, Italian-owned, cannery. Around 1921 most of the immigrants began cultivation of French Concord grapes for use as table grapes. A cooperative winery soon failed, but the Welch Grape Company began purchasing entire harvests in the 1930s for jellies and jams. Thereupon grapes became the basis of a thriving local industry.

Antonio M. Piazza was one of the first to arrive at Knobview. He built a store, and later was appointed postmaster, in which position he was succeeded by his son, Joseph Piazza, who served until the office was discontinued in 1965. Antonio Piazza’s notebook includes data on a variety of matters, from postal receipts to shipments of produce and sales of vine cuttings. The collection also contains a recorded interview with Piazza’s granddaughter, Jodie Donati, conducted by Francesco Brogi. Brogi, a native of Italy, became interested in the community while a student at the University of Missouri-Rolla. His research paper on Rosati is included in the collection.

Folder 2: Interview of Jodie Donati by Francesco Brogi, recorded on audio cassette, 1982.

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